

Smyth Chapel and Miller's Chapel Water Project Groundbreaking (June 25, 2005)

Lee County, Virginia

I am pleased to return to Lee County this morning to participate in the groundbreaking ceremony for a new public water project for the residents of the Smyth Chapel and Miller's Chapel communities. This new infrastructure development project is an outstanding example of the progress we are making in Lee County in establishing public water and wastewater service for residents.

Approximately 10 years ago, only 44 percent of Lee County residents had access to publicly provided drinking water. Since that time, we have actively worked to obtain millions in federal funding to establish new water systems throughout the County, and today, everyone here can proudly acknowledge that this work on the part of many people has born fruit. Today, more than 67 percent of all Lee County homes have access to publicly funded water systems, and that percentage will increase to more than 70 percent following the completion of the Big Hill, Cave Springs water projects, Ocoonita water development project which has been awarded \$3.4 million in federal funding which I obtained, and the project for which we are breaking ground today at Smyth Chapel and Miller's Chapel.

The total cost of construction of this project is \$4,085,300, all of which is being provided through several different federal funding sources. At my request, the U.S. Department of Agriculture, through its Rural Development Agency, is providing a total of \$3,585,300. Of that total amount, \$2,135,300 is being provided as a federal grant, and \$1,450,000 is being provided through a low-interest federal loan. In addition, the Appalachian Regional Commission has agreed to provide a federal grant in the amount of \$500,000 to complete the funding package necessary for the water project.

Residents of the Smyth Chapel and Miller's Chapel communities currently have no access to a public water system. Rather, residents have no choice other than to rely on private wells and springs for their drinking water, which are often unreliable and could fail.

The new public water system for which we are breaking ground today will serve 350 households and four churches in the Smyth Chapel and Miller's Chapel communities. In addition, public water service will be established at the site of the new Wal-Mart store, which is currently under construction.

More than 25 miles of new water lines will be installed along State Routes 647, 641, 643 and 640 in Smyth and Miller's Chapel. At Route 640, the new lines will be connected to the existing water system which serves the Town of Pennington Gap. In addition, one 250,000-gallon water storage tank will be placed at the site of the new Wal-Mart, and one electric remote control valve and two pressure reducing valves will also be installed. The Lee County Public Service Authority will operate and maintain the new system. It is expected that the new public water service will be available to residents and businesses next spring.

There are several individuals who deserve our thanks today for the efforts they have made on behalf of this project and their commitment to establishing safe and reliable drinking water for the residents of Lee County, and I will take the opportunity of these remarks to recognize these individuals.

I would like to commend Claude Ray, Chairman of the Lee County Board of Supervisors and representative of a portion of the service area; D.J. Barker, representative of a portion of the Smyth and Miller's Chapel communities on the Board; and other Members of the Board; for their leadership and foresight in working to establish reliable water service for all of Lee County.

I also want to thank Ernie Whitt, Chairman of the Lee County Public Service Authority; Doc Parsons, Executive Director of the PSA; the excellent staff at the PSA; and Dane Poe, Lee County Administrator. Without these dedicated individuals, we would not be celebrating the outstanding strides Lee County is making in infrastructure development.

Ron Flanary, the Executive Director of the LENOWISCO Planning District Commission, and his staff; Quinton Litrell, Chairman of the Lee County Industrial Development Authority; and Tim Long, Executive Director of the IDA; also deserve our thanks for their strong support of the Smyth Chapel and Miller's Chapel Water Development Project.

I also want to recognize Bobby Lane of Lane Engineering and thank him for lending his expertise to this effort.

I would also like to recognize Ralph King and Bruce Miles, two local residents who have worked tirelessly in support of this project.

Finally, I want to thank my District Director, Laura Lee, and my Project Manager, Courtney Lamie, for their persistent and persuasive work in achieving this success.

Today's ceremony is an example of what can be achieved when citizens and government officials at the local and federal levels work together in aid of a common purpose. For that cooperation and successful work in establishing public water service for the communities of Smyth Chapel and Miller's Chapel, I want to commend everyone here and offer special congratulations to the residents and business owners who will be receiving the new water service.